DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 238 614 RC 014 443

AUTHOR Haughey, Margaret; Murphy, Peter J.
TITLE Professional Continuing Education for Rural Teachers: Promising Prospects for the Future.
PUB DATE Jul 83
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communications Satellites; *Continuing Education; Demography; Educational Quality; Electronic Equipment; Foreign Countries; Job Satisfaction; Migration Patterns; *Professional Training; *Rural Areas; Rural Education; Rural Environment; *Teacher Education; *Teleconferencing
IDENTIFIERS *British Columbia; Interactive Systems

ABSTRACT

For decades, teachers in British Columbia's rural schools have been expected to be professionally up-to-date but have had limited access to continuing professional education. The rough terrain and great distances between communities have made the provision of continuing professional education expensive and difficult. Their lack of access to continued training has been a major source of dissatisfaction among rural teachers. However, experiments since 1979 with interactive satellites and teleconferencing suggest that the traditional barriers to providing continuing training for professional groups in remote communities may have been overcome. The experiments include the interactive satellite transmission of an undergraduate course, four hours per week of live interactive programming for various professional groups, and plans for courses designed around a teleconferencing bridge allowing student-teacher conversation via long distance telephone lines. (SB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED238614

PROFESSIONAL CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR RURAL TEACHERS: PROMISING PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
P. J. Murphy
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Submitted by

Margaret Haughey

and

Peter J. Murphy

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

University of Victoria
Victoria, British Columbia
Canada

July, 1983

RC014443

PROFESSIONAL CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR RURAL TEACHERS: PROMISING PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

The Province of British Columbia is one of the most beautiful and scenic regions of North America. According to McDonald (1966) "it is a land for the young, for dreamers, doers and for those who still seek a challenging life" (p. 5). Similar to many Canadian provinces it occupies a large geographic area, 366255 square miles to be exact, which extends from the Pacific Ocean in the west to the Rocky Mountains in the east. From the United States border, at the 49th parallel, it extends north nearly eight hundred miles to the State of Alaska. The topography, climate and vegetation are extremely varied as one might expect in such a vast land.

At the turn of the century, the river systems of British Columbia, the Liard, Peace, Fraser and Columbia, served as 'water highways' for goldminers, fur traders, pioneers and native people. Today, these same rivers generate hydro-electric power, irrigate desert areas, serve as routes for highways and railway systems and provide recreational facilities for water sports.

The majority of the 2 million people living in the Province, reside in urban centres such as Vancouver, Victoria and Nanaimo, or the valleys of the Interior. Over the past half century there has been a noticeable population drift from the rural to urban areas, a phenomenon which is occurring in other provinces of Canada as well as other countries of the world. This movement of population causes many economists, politicians, university scholars and urban planners great concern because of the adverse impact they perceive it will eventually have on the future growth and development of many nations and regions.

Scattered throughout the Province of British Columbia are numerous

small towns many of which have populations of less than 200 people. The destiny of these settlements will be determined by the extent to which they are able to maintain or increase their populations. In a large number of these communities, the population is maturing quickly as young people move to large communities after graduating from high school.

Many factors naturally influence whether families remain in small rural communities. There are both advantages and disadvantages to rural life. Urban people who move to rural communities in order to be closer to nature find that life in a rural setting can be exciting and harsh.

The quality of education available to the children of a rural community definitely has an impact on whether young families remain in that locality. If parents perceive that their children are being offered a 'second class' education they will move to a centre where the education standards are known to be higher. The experience, knowledge and commitment of the teaching staff of a small rural school substantially influences the quality of education it offers.

Historically, rural teachers have been extremely mobile, a phenomenon which has had an adverse impact on the quality of education offered by many rural schools. Due to a decline in the demand for teachers, government fiscal policies and economic conditions, teacher turnover in rural schools has decreased.

For decades rural teachers in British Columbia have had limited access to continuing professional education. The terrain of the region as well as the great distances between small communities has made it extremely difficult and expensive to provide rural teachers with the professional learning experiences they have requested. Yet, rural

teachers have been expected to be as knowledgeable of recent advances in education as their colleagues in urban centres. Often rural teachers have travelled great distances, at their own expense, to attend a workshop, special summer or provincial conference. Also, many of them have sacrificed their summer holidays to attend one of the provincial universities.

In a recent quality of worklife study completed by Haughey and Murphy (1983), only 22 percent of the 528 rural teachers who participated in the investigation were moderately or highly satisfied with their jobs. One of the major sources of dissatisfaction, as shown in Table 1, was the availability of learning experiences for improving their professional competencies. Over a third of the respondents expressed some disenchantment with opportunities for useful in-service education and opportunities for further study.

A recent survey of educators preferences for graduate study (Oberg and Murphy, 1982), revealed that the subject areas which most respondents wanted to study were educational administration and curriculum studies. Seven hundred and seventy-nine educators reported educational administration as a preferred area of study while five hundred and seventy-seven educators noted curriculum studies to be their major preference for graduate work. The majority of the respondents wanted graduate courses to be offered both on and off-campus.

In October, 1979, Martin (1980) offered educators in five rural communities an undergraduate course by interactive satellite. The 65 students were provided with ten sessions on supervision of instruction a subject of considerably importance to teachers and administrators at that time. When commenting on the success of the experiment Martin reported that:

> The course presented as a Canadian prototype was very well received; student performance on cognitive objectives was excellent and was comparable to face-to-face settings on campus; the presentation at each session appeared superior to on campus courses presented by a single instructor, and the situation opened up the classroom in that instructors taught under the scrutiny of a colleague (p. 297).

A number of technical problems impaired transmission, however, the benefits seem to have outweighed these difficulties.

Since 1968, the University of Victoria, British Columbia, has transmitted four hours of live interactive satellite programming per week from September to May every year. Most of the learning experiences transmitted have been credit courses mainly designed for professional groups. These programmes have varied from 'Nursing Assessment", a course which provided nurses in rural communities with up-to-date information on the initial assessment of patients, to a one-hour seminar with Madeline Hunter on effective teaching.

Since September 1982, the University has employed a microwave system to 'uplink' with the ANIK-B and ANIK-C satellites. A number of instructors are presently planning courses with a teleconferencing bridge, a system which enables students and instructors to converse with each other on long distance telephone lines (Worthington and Murphy, 1983).

Rural teachers in British Columbia had limited access to professional continuing education experiences due to terrain, climate and vastness of the province. This situation has been of great concern to many teachers; in fact, research has shown insufficient opportunities for professional development has an adverse impact on the quality of life of rural teachers. Recent experiments with cable television, conference bridges and interactive satellites suggest that traditional barriers to providing

professional groups in remote communities may have been overcome. At last rural teachers may have access to professional continuing education learning experiences which their colleagues in urban centres tend to take for granted. The future appears to hold some promising prospects for rural teachers.

REFERENCES

McDonald, H.L. British Columbia: Challenge in abundance. Victoria: The Canadian Confederation Centennial Committee of British Columbia, 1966.

Haughey, M. L. and Murphy, P. J. A study of teacher job satisfaction and retention in rural schools. Unpublished research project. Victoria: University of Victoria, British Columbia, 1982.

Oberg, Antoinette and Murphy, Peter J. A survey of preferences for post-graduate study in British Columbia. Victoria: Education, University of Victoria, British Columbia, 1982.

Martin, Y. M. Analysis of an experimental University course via satellite: Implications for interactive teacher-learning systems. In L. A. Parker and C. Olgren (eds.). Teleconferencing and interaction media. Madison: Extension Centre for Interactive Programs, University of Wisconsin, 1980.

Worthington, Wendy and Murphy, Peter J. Student teacher supervision: A new application of teleconferencing. A project proposal. Victoria: Faculty of Education, University of Victoria, British Columbia, 1983.